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skins through compromise. Here is a play that tells us how men and women realize themselves, and thus are saved.

Technically, this drama is interesting because it stands at the culmination of its author's long career. Mr. Howard's plays have always exhibited a craftsmanship on a par with the best dramatic accomplishment of their time. But most of them were written many years ago, at the time of stage conventions now outworn. The aside and the soliloquy, both reflective and constructive, and those other labor-saving devices of a former generation, were used by Mr. Howard in the plays of his earlier period, just as they were used by Mr. Pinero in his early farces. For this reason, plays as good as "The Henrietta" and "The Banker's Daughter" seem old-fashioned in form when they are revived by stock companies to-day. But Mr. Howard's art has grown with this growing age. His workmanship in "Kate" is rigid and compressed: there are no soliloquies or asides. As in Ibsen's later pieces, much of the action takes place off the stage, and the play concerns itself not so much with exhibiting the main events of the story as with exhibiting the effect of these events upon the characters. That Mr. Howard, thus late in his career, should entirely revise his methods of construction in order to keep pace with the progress of the stage is a striking indication of that thoroughness which has always been apparent in his work.

"Kate" requires for its presentation a company of even excellence throughout—such a company as is seldom aggregated nowadays in our American theatres. But it is to be hoped that the play may shortly be produced by a cast of the required competence. Meanwhile, it is fortunate that we may read it in book form. It is pleasing as an entertainment, and profitable as a criticism of life.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

"THE BREATH OF THE RUNNERS."

WHAT is it the American novel lacks? We hear the question continually, and the answers are various. An historic setting, background, atmosphere, art—the lack of all these makes for the peculiarly harsh angularity of the American product. When "The Divine Fire" appeared, a critic of high standing said: "The sad part of it all is that it could not be an American novel; it has the charm, the fulness, the ripe beauty of centuries

of ease and leisure and scholarship." "The Breath of the Runners" is an American novel, and yet it has as much charm as an English novel; while, in intricate and skilful structure, not only sentence and paragraph building, but chapter balancing chapter, opening forecasting the end and the end striking again all the notes of the beginning, the clever leading in and weaving together of separate *motifs*, the gathering up all the threads at the most complex point in the middle, the slight episodical interlude, holding back the action before the catastrophe, in all these matters of skilful and artistic rendering one can only compare the book with French art; not with the massive work of the world's greatest geniuses, those who have revived an age or made some great world-struggle come into life at their touch, but with the work of fastidious craftsmen who deliberately choose a narrower field in order to perfect it more highly; with writers like Merimée, Stendhal and Loti, all craftsmen *par excellence*—standing by the art of these men, Miss Mears's book is not shamed.

In the medallion on the cover is a group of The Runners, the group which we know as it stands in sun and rain in the Luxembourg Gardens; on the back is an adorably blithe little figure of Victory, with palm and wreath outstretched, footing it lightly over the top of a globe. We need no telling that Miss Mears is an artist among artists, the book cover tells us that. The motto is taken from Taine: "To succeed—this word, unknown a century ago, is to-day the sovereign ruler of all lives." This, then, is the main theme, the breath of the runners, the chase for preeminence, and the recurring *motif* of the story is the refrain of the shoes, beginning with the misfits which Gaston made in his little French shoe-shop on East Twenty-third Street, occurring again when Beulah returns from that visit in which she first declares her intention to be a sculptor and sees the shoes which the customer had brought back, sitting "with their mute, returned look" on the shelf. "O, the tale of the shoes! If men would but look they could read many a fine biography." It is never quite mute, this *motif* of the shoes; it recurs when Beulah finds of her dead friend only the little slime-bespattered boots; and away off there in Paris, a mature woman bearing the sorrows and the rude awakenings of middle life, the vision rises again before her, and instead of the passing scene she sees her father's shop, "filled with twilight, and herself a girl standing at the door of

it. Eagerly she watched the feet of the passers-by—some dragging, some limping, some hurrying, some even running, all intent on an object." Yes, the panting breath of the runners, the clatter of feet, the hurrying past of human bodies intent on a distant goal are the flowing accompaniment to this exquisite tale of friendship, of love and of art.

In this atmosphere of the studio, "The Breath of the Runners" stands alone among American novels; there is nothing to compare it with. It is known that the author practically grew up in studios. Herself the sister of a well-known sculptor and a close friend of the greatest sculptor our country has ever produced, it is natural that the story should be impregnated with art; but, beyond that, the author has achieved the miracle of dropping a veil of romance and of artistic impulse and struggle over New York City. Shall we ever walk down Twenty-third Street again without looking for Gaston's shop and thinking of the little narrow enclosed court at the back, embowered with vines, where Elizabeth of the Madonna face played with her babies, a little court which he had beautified twenty years before for his young wife, copying it from the background of a Da Vinci in the Louvre? Shall we ever pass the corner where the Lexington Avenue car sweeps round the curve without looking for the window of the house and wondering at which window we may see the pale, tense face of Enid watching?

In every book which we read seriously at all, criticism eventually concerns itself with the personality which projects the work. How full, how deep, how original is the mind behind the book? What has the writer to give that is vital or significant? In "The Breath of the Runners," the peculiar and marked gift of the author is that of the artistic perception; the keenness and trained development of the visual faculty predominating over all others are evident on each page—the tall red-faced building that looked like a glutton, licking the pavement with its front steps like a tongue, glaring with its second-story windows, this is a fantastic bit of vision; but Beulah's hair, of the neutral tone which varies from the color of wet sand to a quite blond lightness, that is the painter's keen eye for shades and *nuances*; James Wooding with his lean face and hollows under his cheekbones, his nose an ugly stump and his eyes two crows that watched, and Matthias, in color like a shell and in shape pure Gothic, all these

bits of observation proclaim the artist. There are two wonderful pictures of cities, the one New York, in the afternoon, when the sun lay low along the streets and the people seemed wading in sunshine; the other, a Roman street scene at night, which, however alien the subjects, yet seems to be treated in words exactly after the manner of Monet with the brush; at least one may feel sure that the old painter and the young author looked at dripping light and slow-rising darkness through the same veil of emotion.

Miss Mears's novel has many snatches of condensed wisdom:

"The utterances of mature wisdom are often the sayings of youth, with the stamp of the divine washed off."

"What first love is to the heart, first achievement is to the mind—the golden age. But it must ever be our first love—the first achievement. Later our happiness may stretch to the mortal limit, but only once can we know the proud sense of power—that divine egotism—that joy of the gods that foresees in the future neither failure nor the satiety of success—that takes no note of the stretches of darkness because of the stars that still beckon us on."

"The hold of a miser on his gold cannot be compared in tenacity with the hold of a mind over the least ray of genius which is its own. Work is an ocean into which we can plunge and lose all our worries; for, thus submerged, the largest of them grow unimportant, trivial. The individual in us hangs its head, the universal comes to life."

Miss Mears has recently said in an essay on methods of work: "My ideal is this, that a novel should flow over the consciousness of the reader with something of the emotional truth of music." With the emotional truth of music and with the exciting exhilaration of fine painting this novel touches us—an individual, an exalted and a poetic vision of the world with its great hurrying procession of human beings, making whither no man shall say. It is difficult to think of another first novel of the same power and promise, except one of two decades ago, which, with all its brilliancy and fervor, remained the sole fruit on its tree. It is pleasant to know that Miss Mears is well advanced on another novel which promises to be of larger scope than this one, though he would be difficult, indeed, who should wish it of more exquisite quality. There is something in the youth and the freshness, the first poetic outlook upon dawning life, never to be seized a second time, but which permeates "The Breath of the Runners."

LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.